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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 000195

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR/RAVALOMANANA: I DID NOT RESIGN!

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FO REASONS 1.4 D AND E.

¶1. (C) A breathless ex-President Ravalomanana phoned the ambassador today from his undisclosed location (believed to be somewhere near Antsirabe) to explain a few things. Referring to their last two dramatic meetings on Tuesday morning (when he showed the US and South African ambassadors and UN Mediator Drame his signed ordinance transferring power to a military directorate, before taking flight), he stated that he had not resigned. "I was forced to sign this by the military who came to my office and threatened me 15 minutes before you came in, The 'military directorate' idea was a way not to do what they wanted," he said. "Then I barely got out before they came back after you left." He pointed out (correctly) that the word "resignation" is nowhere to be found in that document. He implored the USG to follow SADC in not recognizing TGV, to whom he had been unwilling to transfer power directly on Tuesday, he added. "This is a coup." He indicated that he is in touch "with SADC" to get himself (and presumably his wife and one remaining son) out of the country as he feels very threatened. He did not request USG assistance in getting him out, and the ambassador did not offer any.

¶2. (2) The ambassador expressed hope that he will get out of Madagascar unharmed and supported his decision to leave. He told Ravalomanana that the USG yesterday had called the change of power "undemocratic" and will have more to say after further review. He explained to Ravalomanana that whatever the USG says, it will be consistent with our laws, values, and principles -- and is not meant to express a partisan view or support for one side or the other in this continuing conflict.

¶3. (C) Ambassador's Comment: Ravalomanana clearly is still all over the map on what he wants to do next: stay, flee, engage in politics, withdraw, etc. He sent an intermediary, political dinosaur Manadafy Rakotonirina, to see me this morning (septel); Manadafy spoke of Ravalomanana's desire to launch a "comeback" and foreshadowed his latest position that, in fact, he did not resign. I have no knowledge of any ongoing SADC effort to rescue Ravalomanana but will continue to check around. One very unfortunate thing is that Ravalomanana continues to exhibit a high degree of cluelessness and disdain for what's best for Madagascar. He also continues (as most Malagasy do, unfortunately,) to interpret everything foreigners say or do in an entirely inaccurate, partisan way, looking for support for themselves from a position in support of democratic principles. He will not change, and I won't be surprised when he takes our decision on suspending non-humanitarian aid, when announced, as "evidence" of continuing USG support for him personally. Even more unfortunately, the new regime, and many in the Malagasy public (with the regime's encouragement), will also see it that way.

MARQUARDT